

# GAGGA 2.0 Evaluation: regional case studies: Srikandi Lestari Foundation's support of women's leadership in climate action against fossil fuel extraction in Indonesia

**Increased leadership of women to act as environmental defenders**

Srikandi Lestari Foundation is a **key actor** (i.e. prominent actor throughout the provision of support, and made significant interventions at different stages to help bring about the change/outcome, alongside other actors)

**Strong evidence** based on interviews with CBO staff, community women, funder, external interview with Panut Hadisiswoyo (Chair of the North Sumatra Provincial Forestry Forum), GAGGA documentation and media reports

Srikandi Lestari Foundation, CBO, Indonesia, ASIA  
Funded by Women's Fund Asia via Mama Cash, 2024

## Summary of outcome

**Increased leadership and capacity of village women to act as environmental defenders and advocates** speaking out on environmental issues, in particular pollution caused by coal-fired power plants (e.g. Pangkalan Susu coal plant) in their area.

### 1. Background

**Southeast Asia** is widely recognised as one of the most at-risk regions to the impact of climate change, disproportionately affecting women and marginalised groups who face multiple systemic barriers to climate change decision making and remain under-represented in leadership positions, undermining the potential of policies to reduce vulnerabilities and enable genuine change. Women make up a significant part of the workforce in climate-vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry and energy. Their greater reliance and unequal access to natural resources, the disproportionate burden on unpaid care work and prevalence of discriminatory social norms continue to challenge their ability to adapt and build long-term resilience.<sup>1</sup>

**Carbon emissions** - Indonesia is in the top 10 list of countries with the highest carbon footprint<sup>2</sup> and coal-fired power plants account for almost half (47%) of its electricity supply.<sup>3</sup> Commitments have been made to reduce carbon emissions<sup>4</sup> and in 2022 the former president banned new permits for the construction of new coal-based power stations (PLTUs) and announced plans to retire 12 PLTUs in 2023, including the Pangkalan Susu power plant. However, a transition away from fossil fuels were called into question when the government passed a raft of deregulation measures serving the interests of the mining companies, which will have a detrimental effect on the environment and people's health.<sup>5</sup> In 2024, the current president, Prabowo Subianto, pledged at the G20 Summit in Brazil to retire Indonesia's entire fleet of coal-fired and other fossil-fuelled power plants within 15 years but this has been met with scepticism.<sup>6</sup>

**Women's rights & gender equality** - Indonesia's Social Institutions and Gender Index score of 45 (2023) denotes higher levels of discrimination, compared to an average score of 39 in Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup> **Discriminatory laws and social norms that confine women to care and reproductive roles and position men as breadwinners and decision-makers** persist. Muslim women do not have the same rights to inheritance as men. **Violence against women remains a concern** with

<sup>1</sup> See - [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/State-of-Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-in-ASEAN\\_FINAL-1.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/State-of-Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-in-ASEAN_FINAL-1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Indonesia is 6<sup>th</sup> globally according to Greenmatch (2022) - <https://www.greenmatch.co.uk/blog/countries-with-the-highest-carbon-footprint>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/indonesia-coal-fossil-fuel-clean-energy-transition/>

<sup>4</sup> For example, at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow in 2021, Indonesia agreed to the Glasgow Climate Pact to achieve net zero emissions (NZE) before 2050 by reducing reliance on fossil-based energy sources including coal.

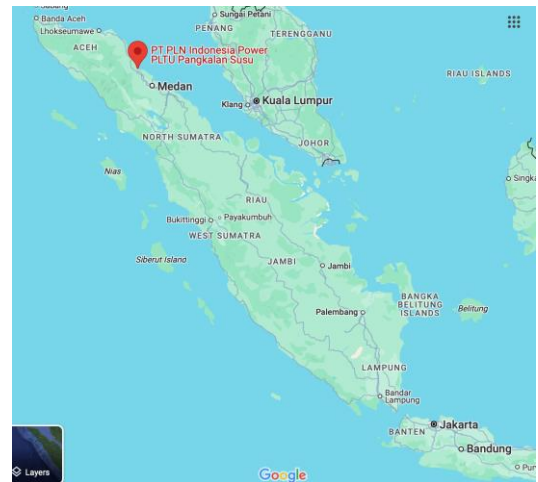
<sup>5</sup> <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/03/indonesia-coal-ash-hazardous-waste-pollution/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.jetknowledge.org/insights/indonesia-prabowo-new-president-just-energy-transition/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://webfs.oecd.org/devsigi/SIGI%202023%20Country%20Profiles/country\\_profile\\_IDN\\_Indonesia.pdf](https://webfs.oecd.org/devsigi/SIGI%202023%20Country%20Profiles/country_profile_IDN_Indonesia.pdf)

22% of women aged 15-49 having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former partner at least once during their lifetime. Most of the population of Indonesia (72%) believe that men make better political leaders than women and 63% believe that men make better business executives. This **negatively affects women's ability to take up decision making roles** across all spheres of life. Women's political representation remains low; women accounted for only 22% of parliamentary members in 2023.<sup>8</sup> Whilst women constitute 42% of landowners, they often face **barriers to accessing education, training, finance and opportunities for leadership roles in the environmental sector**. In addition, **women's unpaid care work can limit their time and resources for engaging in environmental activism**. Despite this, Indonesian women are **deeply rooted in their local environments**, often serving as guardians of nature, managing forests, farmlands and marine ecosystems with reverence and care.<sup>9</sup>

**Srikandi Lestari Foundation** - is a self-led organisation of local women activists, working to **strengthen women's leadership on sustainable restoration, maintenance and protection of coastal and forest ecosystems**. Established in 2015, and operating in north Sumatra, Srikandi organises grassroots marginalised women to promote environmental justice in their communities. Srikandi reports that native forests and mangroves in the project area have experienced significant environmental damage due to **illegal logging, conversion of forests to oil palm plantations and the operation of 4 coal based power plants in the area, including the Pangkalan Susu coal-fired power plant**. This has increased communities' vulnerability to extreme climate events and negative health impacts, while negatively affecting fishing and agriculture related livelihoods. This economic stress has **exacerbated Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)** which is already prevalent due to **patriarchal gender norms and unequal power dynamics**.<sup>10</sup> Women in these communities experience multiple forms of SGBV, such as intimate partner violence and expropriation from the land. GAGGA's Alliance member, Mama Cash, began supporting Srikandi through an intermediary, Women's Fund Asia, with two grants from their 2022/23 and 2024/25 grant cycles as well as two travel grants in 2023 and 2024.



## 2. What has changed (outcome)?

The Chinese-built Pangkalan Susu coal-fired power plant was handed over to PLN, the government electricity board, in 2016 but was only fully operational in 2021. In 2022, Srikandi undertook 6 months of **qualitative research on the negative effects of the plant** between 2019-22 in 5 adjacent villages.<sup>11</sup> The research uncovered the impacts of the pollution caused by the coal-fired plant - 659 fishermen had lost their livelihoods due to air pollution, 333 farmers experienced crop failure and 145 hectares of mangrove forests were destroyed.<sup>12</sup> Srikandi's Director, Sumiati Surbakti, reported that following the research, in 2022 the organisation **worked with local communities Srikandi** (335 people - 220 men and 115 women from two regencies, Langkat and Deliserdang, in North Sumatra province), **including women that they already had a relationship with, to raise awareness** on the issue of climate change using the research findings. They talked about increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and floods, explaining that these were caused by climate change and were not supernatural. They also discussed how coal pollution was negatively affecting their lives

<sup>8</sup> Compared to a world average of 27% although in alignment with other countries in Southeast Asia which average 22%. See - [https://webfs.oecd.org/devsigi/SIGI%202023%20Country%20Profiles/country\\_profile\\_IDN\\_Indonesia.pdf](https://webfs.oecd.org/devsigi/SIGI%202023%20Country%20Profiles/country_profile_IDN_Indonesia.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See - <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/our-insights/esg/the-role-of-women-in-safeguarding-nature-and-biodiversity.html#:~:text=Indonesian%20women%2C%20deeply%20rooted%20in%20their%20local,and%20marine%20ecosystems%20with%20reverence%20and%20care.&text=Through%20practices%20such%20as%20agroforestry%2C%20medicinal%20plant,also%20foster%20alternative%20livelihoods%20within%20forest%2Ddependent%20communities>

<sup>10</sup> See for example - <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10021784/>

<sup>11</sup> The research indicated that a total of 243 residents from five neighbouring villages near the PLTU experienced itching, 42 individuals suffered from respiratory infections and 4 people contracted black lung disease, which resulted in the loss of 3 lives. See - <https://mongabay.co.id/2022/12/13/penyakit-warga-sekitar-pltu-pangkalan-susu-dari-gatal-gatal-sampai-paru-paru-hitam/>

<sup>12</sup> Srikandi Lestari Foundation's Most Significant Change Story (2024)

in various sectors, including health, the environment, agriculture and fisheries, and even trafficking as well as the importance of energy transition from fossil fuels.

Between March 2022 and March 2023, Srikandi established 'Women's Zones' a **digital learning space for grassroots women** to increase access for women in remote areas to experts and professionals on issues related to the climate crisis, the environment, sustainable forest management and climate justice. In these programmes, women role played as journalists and interviewed climate and gender experts. The programmes (interviews) lasted for 1 hour every month for a year, with a total of 17 sessions. The 17 sessions have been published on Srikandi's YouTube channel to increase their reach through social media.<sup>13</sup> This not only helped their own learning about the issues but also **prepared them for engagement with the media**. The **women's groups** (which include 115 women) **subsequently took part in awareness raising campaigns** between 2022 and 2024 and advocated against the four existing coal plants and government plans to build two more. Srikandi shared the research findings with local advocacy partners and collaborated with the media to raise awareness of the negative effects of the plant.<sup>14</sup> As a result, in 2023 numerous **media articles circulated highlighting the negative effects** of the plants. These articles included interviews with Srikandi's staff underlining their **advocacy demands of government** which included the closure of the plant and a switch to renewable energy; a cease in the funding of false energy solutions (i.e ineffective strategies promoted by polluters and some governments that divert attention from alternatives which reduce emissions and protect the land and its peoples and may even worsen the climate crisis); the recovery of environmental damage including livelihood areas affected; and the protection of human rights of those affected by the extractive industry. These press reports also included interviews with affected communities and other local organisations, such as [Greenpeace Indonesia](#) and experts who supported these demands.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst influencing work by Srikandi and local women began before the GAGGA 2.0 programme, it has continued in the grant period. For example, Indonesia Power, which manages the Pangkalan Susu, denied Srikandi's accusations of causing environmental pollution in 2020,<sup>16</sup> but local women involved in this work continued to speak out on environmental issues. With continued encouragement from Srikandi, the women, Srikandi Lestari itself and other local organisations successfully campaigned for against the construction of units 5 and 6 of the power plant. The **government removed the construction of these units from the 2021 Regional Development Plan (RUPTL)**.<sup>17</sup> In addition, following an announcement in 2021 by President Jokowi announced that the coal waste produced from the plant was non-hazardous and non-toxic, this resulted in the plant distributing coal ash to the community around Pangkalan Susu. In 2022, local women began sharing the negative impacts of coal ash to their families and neighbours to galvanise opposition to the dumping. They also participated in protests against the dumping and reported that they stopped the dumping of dangerous fly ash by monitoring this activity and uploading photos of dumped ash on social media channels.

Srikandi also facilitated local women's groups to engage directly with Panut Hadisiswoyo, the Chair of the North Sumatra Provincial Forestry Forum.<sup>18</sup> Panut has been a strong ally as he heads up the [Green Justice Indonesia](#).<sup>19</sup> Collaboration with local research organisation, [WALHI](#), to engage with the forestry forum resulted in the **establishment of two social forestry groups and permits where women will work alongside men to manage forests for 35 years in a 90-hectare social forestry area** in the Langkat district, which will

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<sup>13</sup> See example of Women's Zone programme here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCE1FKIL9s8>

<sup>14</sup> See for example - <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/indonesia-coal-fossil-fuel-clean-energy-transition/>

<sup>15</sup> See for example, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/en-warga-terdampak-pltu-batubara-sumut-kami-tidak-bisa-menunggu-sampai-2060/amp> and <https://mongabay.co.id/2022/12/13/penyakit-warga-sekitar-pltu-pangkalan-susu-dari-gatal-gatal-sampai-paru-paru-hitam/>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.pengawal.id/2020/04/dituding-cemari-lingkungan-ini.html>

<sup>17</sup> In the 2019 RUPTL (Regional Development Plan), PLTU units 5 and 6 entered the construction phase. Following the opposition campaign by Srikandi and others, the construction of units 5 and 6 was removed from the 2021 RUPTL. Then, in 2023, the coal-fired power plant was added to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources' early retirement list. The Pangkalan Susu PLTU had only been operating for seven years. Typically, coal-fired power plants in Indonesia are retired after 25 years. See also - <https://www.petroindo.com/news/article/ministry-identifies-33-coal-power-plants-for-early-retirement>

<sup>18</sup> This is a multi-stakeholder forum which is part of the Ministry of Environment consisting of NGOs, corporations, government, academia and customary and traditional indigenous leaders who have an interest in the forestry section in the region. From key external informant interview with Panut Hadisiswoyo on 15.07.25.

<sup>19</sup> A think tank for action and research on environment and biodiversity, founded by a group of conservationists in Indonesia.

increase carbon sequestration and reduce vulnerability to flooding. This agreement was established between the Indah Lestari Women's groups and forest farmers' groups and is an important achievement, given that women have a limited role in village-level decision making.

Srikandi played a role in providing and **distributing mangrove and perennial plants to various villages with critical forests in need of mangrove rehabilitation**. They coordinate with local government actors to provide space for women's groups to participate in forest conservation in their villages; provide training on climate change and the importance of protecting, caring for, and monitoring forest conditions, especially mangrove forests. They involve children, young people, activists, journalists, students and environmental human rights advocates in these activities. As a result, Srikandi supported local women to lead their communities on the **rehabilitation of native forests and mangroves**, resulting in the planting of 5,000 new mangrove trees as a buffer to protect themselves from the dust emitted by the power plant. This number was expanded to 85,000 plants in, which were distributed to other villages by the women. The rehabilitation of the mangroves also supports women's livelihoods and in line with this, the women are working alongside other women from four surrounding villages to promote the use of non-timber forest products.

As demonstrated by media reports, to advance their advocacy aims, Srikandi **works in coalition with civil society organisations also influencing for a transition to clean energy** across Sumatra. For example, Srikandi is a member of the Bright Sumatra for Clean Energy (STuEB) alliance (also known as the Sumatra Rejects Extinction Coalition)<sup>20</sup> and works with others such as [Greenpeace Indonesia](#) and [Apel Green Aceh Foundation](#).<sup>21</sup> According to Srikandi's Director, these organisations **work in solidarity - sharing information** for example, on current government policies and they jointly lobby the Indonesian government. Panut expressed that the impact of the programme reaches beyond north Sumatra because of the way that Srikandi has undertaken national level advocacy against dirty energy, by **linking advocacy from the local to the national level through their influencing work around** the coal powered plant in Pangkalan Susu. Panut stated: *'the movement from Srikandi is waking up Government to consider that this is a critical issue.'* He also felt that Srikandi had effectively linked social (e.g. livelihoods) and environmental issues. This was reiterated in an interview with one of the local women: *'Srikandi builds a bridge between us and the outside world and how we can fight for a clean environment. They also take us to have discussions with other communities. Sometimes we are invited by others<sup>22</sup> like Greenpeace to Bali and Jakarta and that comes because of Srikandi. Without them we wouldn't know how to fight.'*<sup>23</sup> Women's groups have also received support from journalists to take part in a [Youtube video](#) about the impact of pollution on children, which was made by Watchdoc, Greenpeace Indonesia and Enter Nusantara.

### 3. How have these changes come about?

*What actors and factors contributed to the change and especially the CBO? Were we able to evidence that? Provide sources of information of how the change happened when describing what different actors have done. Were there internal changes in the partner that are linked to the change?*

**Funding from GAGGA, via Mama Cash to Women's Fund Asia** has enabled this work to take place. Women's Fund Asia confirmed that Srikandi Lestari received:<sup>24</sup>

- Funding from their 2022-23 grant cycle: a **one-year programme grant** (which included a small portion of core costs) **of USD 10,000**. This grant was to support 'the contribution and involvement of women in natural resource management, using an eco-feminism analysis situating this work within the context of the region.' This was done by creating spaces for women to engage with local governments towards food security, ecological justice and by sustaining mangroves and forests for the future of the community and their children.

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<sup>20</sup> The "Bright Sumatra" initiative, also known as "Sumatera Terang Untuk Energi Bersih" (STuEB), is an initiative to accelerate the transition to clean energy in the Indonesian province of Sumatra, specifically advocating for the accelerated retirement of coal-fired power plants.

<sup>21</sup> See - <https://apelgreenaceh.or.id/en/publikasi-aga/sumatera-terang-untuk-energi-bersih-stueb-sumatera-menolak-punah-2/>

<sup>22</sup> There was also mention of Nexus Tree, Greenpeace, LBH and Indonesian Ocean Justice as supportive organisations based outside the area.

<sup>23</sup> From Nurhayati, as part of a group interview with local women on 8.07.25.

<sup>24</sup> From an interview (29 May 2025) with and written notes from Yasmin Yasidi, Thematic Lead for Environmental Justice, Women's Fund Asia.



- Funding from their 2024-25 grant cycle: a **two-year core and programme grant of USD 30,000** based on results from Srikandi's first grant to support. The grant was to support women's role in natural resource management in a number of regencies in Northern Sumatra.
- Travel grants: in 2023, a **travel grant of USD 1,500** in 2023 for Srikandi's Director to attend the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum, held from 1-3 September at Atmajaya University, Jakarta. This was an important opportunity for Srikandi to **learn from other organisations in the region about strategies and tactics** in fighting for women's rights and environmental justice. In 2024, **travel grants of USD 2,450 each** were provided for Srikandi's Director and Programme Manager, who was conducting research on the links between climate change, gender-based violence and child marriage, for the AWID Conference in Bangkok to help them network and to build solidarity.

This funding has helped strengthen the capacity of local women to build their leadership skills in fighting fossil fuel extraction and to undertake influencing work with local communities, local and national government officials and work closely with other environmental focused organisations. This has helped the women *'become more bold'* according to the Director of Srikandi.

Key strategies that supported the change include:

- **Building women's leadership as environmental defenders** by working regularly with women's groups in affected communities and linking them to each other. Srikandi is **building women's knowledge of climate justice issues**, particularly how they are affected by extractive industries and to build women's organising, leadership and advocacy skills. Over time, these women have built the *'courage to speak about what they feel'* as reported by Srikandi's Director.
- **Strengthening the position of women in the process of developing and managing forests at the village level** as confirmed by Panut: *'Srikandi is providing women with opportunities to get involved and not just consider themselves as housewives, but that they have a key role to show that communities care about the environment, that they are concerned about their livelihoods through the damage to the mangroves.'*<sup>25</sup> Srikandi reports village level meetings that they set up have helped to build community support for women's leadership, enabling them to be part of the social forestry groups to manage local forests. This also helps to **challenge patriarchal gender norms around women's decision-making**. Women have gained recognition for the environmental mitigation and adaptation work as well as for their leadership skills.
- **Strengthening the impact of their advocacy work by working in coalitions with other organisations.**
- **Cross-sector support from other civil society actors and some journalists for the campaign against coal-fired power plants** in the project area and greater public awareness of the local impact; as well as stronger national and international support of the campaign.
- **Working with women holistically** – it was reported that whilst violence against women was not a new issue, it was exacerbated by the pressure on families when livelihoods were affected. The coal powered plant was seen to be having a 'domino effect' in terms of affecting food security, reductions in family income and an increase in violence against women. With this knowledge, Srikandi set up regular sessions with the women's groups to help them take part in enjoyable excursions to the beach and joint activities such as singing and dancing.
- **Leveraging the media to build greater public awareness** through the production of digital content for their own social media channels (e.g. their [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) channels even though these are regularly taken down from YouTube, so have to be re-uploaded). Also, through working with journalists sympathetic to their work.
- **Organisational strengthening of Srikandi** through grants received by GAGGA's intermediary, Women's Fund Asia.

In terms of **sustaining the changes** that have come about, Panut felt that securing the 35 year permits by women to manage the mangrove forests would sustain the work undertaken by Srikandi. He stated that: *'local women's groups feel that this responsibility should be held by them through collective action - it's a legacy that they want to maintain. They know the future is up to them, not Srikandi. Their livelihoods depend on it.'* Yasmin from Women's Fund Asia reflected that Srikandi benefits from a longstanding presence in

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<sup>25</sup> From key informant interview conducted on 15.07.25.

coastal communities for over 10 years and during this time, *'they have built really strong relationships with the local women (which) forms the basis of the success (of this initiative).'*' Communities clearly trust and value the relationship with the organisation. It was reported that even when Srikandi did not have grant funding, staff would donate their own money and volunteer their time, and communities would donate food items to keep trainings going. This has enabled them to continue their work without funding. However, wider concerns were expressed by Yasmin about the current global context, with a decrease in funding and whether Srikandi would be able to access resources in future.

## Conclusion

Several lessons emerged from the work supported by GAGGA 2.0:

- **Long term relationships with women's groups** in coastal communities have built trust and enabled Srikandi Lestari to work effectively alongside women to build their skills to become advocates themselves. The Director stated that one of her learnings was that it was important for grassroots women themselves to be heard, and not Srikandi as their representatives: *'we are the messenger, they are the ones that voice their concerns.'*
- **The importance of a legislative framework** particularly social and environmental impact assessments has enabled the policy work as well as developing good relationships with the social forestry commission. Yasmin felt that the organisation could expand their influencing work through more engagement with UN human rights mechanisms and spaces such as taking part in the Conference of Parties (COP) to engage with the UNFCCC, or shadow reporting for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This may be particularly important given the limited traction on influencing the coal plants directly and influencing the current government given their patchy track record on climate justice.
- **The need to plan and budget for staff security** has been a learning, as staff have received threats of violence and there was an attempted murder in 2023 because of their work against coal powered plants in the area. Srikandi's Most Significant Change story (2024) states that the core grant from Women's Fund Asia helped strengthen organisational capacity on auditing and operations, but funds were not used for *'safety, resilience and welfare for the organisation as these crucial needs were not included in the grant budget proposed by the organisation.'* However, as the grant from Women's Fund Asia was renewed in 2024 with GAGGA resourcing, Srikandi has allocated 15% of this funding towards staff wellbeing, resilience and contingencies.

In summary, through the support of GAGGA, Srikandi is supporting **women's leadership on climate action against fossil fuel extraction**. Srikandi Lestari has been able to deepen its relationship with local women and strengthen their ability to undertake climate justice activities – both rehabilitation of affected land, thereby improving their own livelihoods as well as leading on influencing work at different levels. The women they have supported are demonstrating leadership in natural resource management of forests impacted by the coal plant, helping to challenge discriminatory gender norms and improve their status in their communities. In addition, Srikandi has increased access to community-based forests traditionally managed and controlled by men.

There is **strong evidence** to demonstrate that Srikandi Lestari is a **key or prominent actor** in the programme through the provision of support and made significant interventions at different stages, to help bring about the change/outcome, alongside other actors. Data was collected through the organisation's Most Significant Change story and GAGGA documentation; interviews with Sumiati Surbakti (Srikandi's Director); a group of 7 affected local women; Yasmin Yasidi (Thematic Lead for Environmental Justice at Women's Fund Asia); an external interview with Panut Hadisiswoyo (Chair of the North Sumatra Provincial Forestry Forum) as well as through secondary data research.

Contribution to GAGGA's Programme Outcomes

Outcome 1.1: *Strengthened capacities of women-led CBOs in the Global South, supported by GAGGA, to lead collaborative and inclusive L&A for gender-just climate solutions and*

Outcome 1.2: *Strengthened capacities of GAGGA network partners to engage in, lead, document and/or promote gender-just climate solutions that prioritise people and planet*

Outcome 3: *GAGGA network partners influenced decision-making on climate (related) policy, investments and donor funding for gender-just climate solutions promoted by people-centred movements in the Global South.*

Outcome 2: *Increased linking and Lobby and Advocacy collaboration between climate, environmental justice and women's rights movements within and across local, regional and global levels, through GAGGA network partners.*